

[National Biscuit Company Workers]

Dup.

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER May Swenson

ADDRESS 29 1/2 Morton Street, N.Y.C.

DATE March 21, 1939

SUBJECT National Biscuit Company Workers

1. Date and time of interview

This story is continued from the diary of Anna Saitta, written in 1928-29.

2. Place of interview

3. Name and address of informant

4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.

5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you

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6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc,

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK

FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER May Swenson

ADDRESS 29 1/2 Morton Street, N.Y.C.

DATE March 21, 1939

SUBJECT National Biscuit Company Workers JUNE 21, WEDNESDAY

The heat is terrible. The foreman was every five minutes hollering at us today, because we couldn't work fast. Our fingers were bleeding from the hot crackers that stick to the pans, and nearly everyone of us had to go for plaster to the nurse. One girl fainted in Building A. Spanish Mary got fired in spite of the busy season, because she danced the Tango during lunch hour — lifted up her skirts above her knees — the girls clapped and the men workers hollered. But the foreman, that old joy-killer, came in, and later we heard she got the air. We were so sad, this made us more sad than any sad story told by Shirley. Not even the joke about the Irish man and the Jewish-man could cheer us. Jewish Shirley and Irish Gertie got in an argument. Shirley was telling about a funeral, how the husband of a woman died, how the widow fainted, how everybody cried and how the Rabbi prayed. Ha, ha, so the Rabbi prayed. Hmm. So it made you sad? How are you able to eat that sandwich, and a ham sandwich too, while you speak of a funeral and a Rabbi — you Jewish hypocrite. This is what Gertie said to Shirley. Pray! I never pray. When I want something, I pay for it, 2 Gertie said to Shirley. Shirley said Gertie

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was nothing but a whore, and Gertie said, Well, I am no hypocrite, I am a whore, you are too, all of you, but I withdraw every word because you insist to make believe each other, although you don't, that you are virgins. Virgins! Daddy Browning should whistle once, and you all would run after him, he should show you a thousand dollar bill and you all would sleep with him. You're wrong Gertie, German Erna said, Hundred dollars would do. Listen, said Gertie, Poor people can't be good. Why? A poor person has no money and wants to have also nice things, for instance I walk through Fourteenth Street, see those coats in the shopwindows, nice coats, dresses, shawls. While my shoes are torn, my dress is dirty, shabby. I say first, if God would perform a miracle and I would find a purse with thousand dollars, I could buy all those things. I walk through the street, look on the pavement and there is a hope in my heart, maybe I'll find some money. I look my eyes out, but no sir, I see bannana peels, old apapers, cigarettes and such junk, but money? No! Then I say, if there be a God, I must find money. God has to prove me now that he exists, not only in the Bible, but real life. So I say to myself, if there isa God, I'll find money, if there is no God, I wont. And of course I don't find it, and I wish to hell heaven itself. And that's a sin I know to curse God is a deadly sin, and I say the poor ones are all like me, and they'll go to hell after death. And as long as I know I'll go to hell, what's the difference how many sins I have. As long I have to suffer after death, I try at least to have as much sins as possible. And anyone who has brains will agree with me.

We all looked at Gertie, and were waiting for the lightning 3 to strike her to death, but all stayed the same, and not even the foreman took any notice of us.

The friend of Shirley is Nelly, Cornelia, who works next to her on the machine, and she is always telling stories to her, confidentially, but in such a loud voice that all of us can listen. We like to hear Shirley talk — she is always talking in a sad voice even if it is a joke. But Gertie says she is a hypocrite, and whenever she is relating some very gloomy story and almost made us cry, Gertie says something mean, and spoils everything.

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Shirley was telling Nellie about her girl friend. Nelly, listen to this, Nelly, I have a girl friend, this girl friend told this story which is a true story. This girl friend of mine has a boy friend, that boyfriend of my girlfriend has a sister and that sister of my girl friend's boy friend has also a boy friend.

So listen, what happened. So this did happen. That sister of my girlfriend's boyfriend was deeply in love. She fell in love with a fellow, too much. Young girl, foolish girl, eighteen years old, you can imagine. She was crazy over her lover. Crazy, I am telling you. So her brother spoke to his mother. Mother, Ella is deeply in love. So said his mother, What shall I do about it? Let her be in love, I was in love once alos, but not with your Father. But mother, this is a serious thing, she is deeply in love, I am afraid something will happen. So, said his mother, you think something will happen, well if something will happen I'll break her head, and her lover's too. But you are the brother, so you must watch your sister, that something shall not happen as long as she isn't married.

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So the poor boy was very sad. Imagine, a brother should watch a sister! that something that hs to happen shall not happen. So he was very sad. He came to his sweetheart (my girlfriend) and told her. Listen, Ella is deeply in love, I am afraid something will happen to her. Mother is also worried, so please watch her and try to be near her when she is together with that sheik.

So my girlfriend promised to watch over her lover's sister that nothing should happen. Try to watch a girl, a young girl. So what happened? Well, my girlfriend was everywhere, with Ella. She went with them to movies, to the Chinks, to the park. Wherever Ella went, my girlfriend was after them. Believe me she had some hard time!

One day Ella came to my girlfriend's mother, and began to complain. Mrs. Smith, said Ella, I don't feel well. What's the matter my child? asked she. I lost my appetite, I an never hungry, I feel disgusted at everything. Well, you must go home Ella, and consult a doctor,

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go to your mother and tell her you sick. My, Ella got white like thw thew all, then she got red like the red pepper. Finally she began to cry. Mrs. Smith tried to console her but in vain. At last Ella confessed, what do you think what did she confess?

We began to rear from laughter, but Gertie said, that's nothing so new, a bastard is born every minute, it'll be your turn too, Shirley look she's getting fat like horse.

Shirley ignored Gertie and said, in a sad voice, I am telling you, no use watching a young [girl?] when she wants to do something. Nothing can stop her. My girlfriend watched. By god, how she watched over her. 5 JUNE 23, FRIDAY

This afternoon, we received our little, but well deserved wages, \$14. Again to the machine to pick up the hot crackers, sweating and quarrelling as usual with the men workers because they put too much work on, and before we get our wages, the foreman is always snooping around telling us to work faster or we will get canned today. Gertie was cursing, she said she would spit in the jaw of the foreman next time he said something to her. Shirley was talking as usual to Nellie in a sad but calm voice. Nelly, I have a girlfriend (believe me, it pays to be honest) Hmm, pays to be honest. Like hell! said Gerties. This friend of mine was a poor girl, continued Shirley, she was an orphan, she had no parents, and yet she was honest. So what do you think happened? She married a millionaire, we all said. Far from that, Shirley said, but she did get married, honesty pays! she married a truck driver. Gertie said, If that's the reward for honesty, the hell with honesty. You heard of Peaches? she said to Shirley. What a question, of course I did. Who didn't/ Was Peaches honest? said Gertie. I should say she wasn't! Did she marry a truck driver? No, she married Daddy Browning, the millionaire, that crazy old he-goat. Well, triumphantly said Gertie, now you see whether it pays to be honest. An honest girl marries a truck driver. A whore marries Browning, divorces him for money, and gets rich. I never heard that a poor man got rich from being honest. But a dishonest person, though poor, has always luck. For example, Ford, Rockefeller, or other such rascals. Everybody thinks they got rich from work. But, hell, they got rich from cheating. Now all the papers write of them,

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and after they die, they'll have some funeral. An honest man goes on living, suffering, and when he drops dead, not a dog barks after him. I am telling you, it's rotten.

Oh, you are always bellyaching, Shirley said, and she turned to Nellie and started talking. And this is what Shirley said only to Nellie, but so loud that all hand the luck to hear it. Listen, Nellie, did I tell you yet about my boyfriend? No. Shirley, you told me nothing about him. You know I have a boyfriend, Shirley said. This sounds interesting, said I to German Erna, but Erna asked me to keep quite because she wanted to hear the story.

So my boyfriend after I know him for a few weeks, gave me a friendship ring. A diamond ring. Bought for ten cents in Woolworths, interrupted Gertie. So I wore the ring every day. Did I show it to you, Nellie? Well it was a beautiful ring. The other day I look at my finger, and want to see my ring. What you think, the ring disappeared. The ring wasn't there. My heart jumped, I almost fainted. You know, the ring of my boyfriend. I didn't mind the money. Gertie! I bet your boyfriend forgot to pay for it. I didn't mind the money, although it costed him \$50. I should live, so it did. He showed me the bill. But to lose a ring has a meaning. So I had a foreboding, some misfortune happened. I was so scared, I am telling you, I didn't know what to do. So I went to the foreman. So I said to the foreman, Mr. Hick, I lost a ring. That's too bad said Mr. Hick. Yes, I said, and the ring was a present. Is that so? said again Mr. Hick. It was the gift of my boyfriend, I said. Mr. Hick, said, that's still worse. So I told him, I lost the ring in the factory. Mr. Hick promised to make an investigation and try to find out who found or stole the ring. I went home, I couldn't sleep all night. I knew something will happen to my boyfriend. Next day while I was on my relief, the forelady 7 told me to go in the office. So I went in the office. Mr. Hick asked me, how the ring looked. I told him all I knew, and he said, Shirley, don't be sad, here is the ring. But there was another girl too, and she claimed the ring as hers. So he asked her how the ring looks. She couldn't describe it. So the foreman gave her a bawling out because she had the nerve to demand a ring which wasn't hers. This will prove it to you, how dishonest people are. I am telling you, she was red, she was embarrassed, she was ashamed. And I, I said, it pays to be honest. And what happened. Well, my heart didn't lie. I received a

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letter from my boyfriend, in which he informed me he fell down from the elevator, freight elevator, and broke his foot. I am so worried. Nelly, I love him so much, I was crying all morning. My mother said I should stop to cry. You fool, she said, don't cry, crying can't help him. Be calm, he'll soon recover. But try to be satisfied and calm when somebody you love is sick!

We looked at Shirley, and two big tears rolled down on her face. Erna tried to console her, but Shirley said with a melancholy smile, I need not your sympathy, my dear. We all felt sorry for Shirley, only Gertie kept on laughing, she laughed even at such a sad story. Shirley turned to Nelly and said, Nellie have you a sandwich left from lunch, I am so hungry. Nelly took out a sandwich which Shirley devoured with a sad face. We didn't know whether to laugh or wonder. Because it is strange that a girl after relating a tale that her lover broke his foot, should eat with such good appetite. Gertie couldn't stand any longer Shirley's sadness and began to quarrel with her. So you have a boyfriend. Well, be careful that something shall not happen. What? said Shirley. I mean something that happened to your girlfriend's boyfriend's sister. Shirley, honestly you are getting fat.

Shame yourself! said Shirley. But that's your business, said Gertie, you have the right to do as you please. But what bothers me is how in hell are you able to eat after such sad event a sandwich. Why, said Shirley, my stomach has nothing to do with my heart. Ridiculous, you don't want me to lose my appetite because my boyfriend broke his foot/

It seems to me, said German Erna, the more sad you are, the more you eat. Be happy Shirley, otherwise you'll get too fat.

Gertie laughed. What, fat? Look at that shape! She is already fat like a horse.